



Lori Gravalho photo

IT2(Ss) Michael Mendez kisses his wife, Gwen, after returning home from USS Kamehaha's final deployment.

KAMEHAMEHA

RETURNS FROM FINAL DEPLOYMENT



Lt. Cmdr. Dave Warner photo

A hula dancer on the pier serves as a familiar "aloha" to the USS Kamehameha crew as the submarine returned to Pearl Harbor from its final deployment.



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MSC(SS) Max Agpaoa of Waipahu holds his daughter, Kailey, upon returning from USS Kamehameha's final voyage.

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COMSUBPAC Public Affairs

USS Kamehameha (SSN 642) returned to Pearl Harbor June 15 representing the end of the submarine's final deployment. It also marked the end of one of the more operationally diverse heritages of any U.S. vessel over the course of its 36-year life.

Rear Adm. John B. Padgett III, commander of the Pacific Submarine Force, was off-island for the historic return, but sent a message congratulating the crew on their deployment and called the return "bittersweet."

He added that "USS Kamehameha's legacy in the Pacific is renewed. For longer than most of the members of her current crew have been alive, this true warrior has helped secure peace for the nation. Your crew should take significant pride in knowing that they are the last to join in USS Kamehameha's regal legacy."

Fire Control Technician 3rd Class Paul Ballor was sentimental about the trip. "This being my first boat, it'll be part of my history - 30 or 40 years from now I'll be able to remember this," he said.

Ballor also mentioned the uniqueness of the ship and its mission. "I'm really thankful for the luxury of the space we have," he said. "Qualifying and learning about the conversion [from SSBN to SSN] process was interesting, and talking with SEALs and divers helped me decide to apply for EOD (explosive ordi-

nance disposal) training."

Kamehameha returns after traveling to the Western Pacific to perform exercises and missions for which it had been specially reconfigured. Originally built as one of the nation's "41-for-freedom" strategic submarines, USS Kamehameha first went on patrol in 1966 from Guam. The ship had a "blue" and "gold" crew.

After completing a total of 63 deterrent patrols, Kamehameha's missile systems were inactivated in July 1992 and she was converted to a special purpose attack submarine at Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, Calif. The conversion installed modifications to support the surfaced and submerged deployment of special operations forces. In August 1993, Kamehameha arrived in Pearl Harbor to become part of Submarine Squadron One.

Mess Specialist 2nd Class Scott Barber has been a part of Kamehameha's storied past for the past five years.

"It hasn't quite hit me that this is the end. Of all the submarines I've served on, this one definitely holds a special place in my heart. I will miss the crew more than anything. They are a group of professionals and the best friends ever," said Barber.

Two dry deck shelters mounted on the top hull just aft of the sail distinguish the submarine from other Pearl Harbor attack class submarines. With the two shelters and vast storage space, the ship is uniquely capable to transport special forces and

equipment while still performing most of the traditional SSN missions. "We've got a really good crew. A lot of guys are going to miss that when we go," said Machinist Mate George Swies. He added that the part he'll miss the most is the camaraderie of shipmates.

Although USS Kamehameha's return marks the end of its unique history, the submarine may have served to inspire renewed interest in converting other strategic submarines. Currently under study is the conversion of some older strategic SSBNs into SSGNs.

The four oldest Ohio-class strategic submarines homeported in Bangor, Wash. are being considered for a similar conversion whereby their deterrent missiles would be replaced with as many as 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles, modules to support special forces or a combination of the two. The ships are currently slated for inactivation, but have more than 80 years remaining on their collective hull lives.

"I have bittersweet feelings knowing I won't be able to go to the western hemisphere again with this fine submarine. At the same time, it is very rewarding to be part of Kamehameha's legacy and its long service to the nation," said Chief of the Boat, Electronics Technician Master Chief Chuck Minnich.

USS Kamehameha is named after King Kamehameha the Great and is slated for inactivation later this summer.



Sailors heave lines to their pier counterparts to moor USS Kamehameha following the submarine's final deployment. The ship is returned from a four-month deployment to the Western Pacific June 15.

Lt. Cmdr. Dave Warner photo